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Foreword

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American center of oriental research
2018

Arjava , A , Frösen , J & Kaimio , J J 2018 , Foreword . in A Arjava , J Frösen & J Kaimio (eds) , The Petra Papyri V . American Center of Oriental Research Publications , no. 8 , American center of oriental research , Amman , pp. ix-x .

<http://hdl.handle.net/10138/311860>

publishedVersion

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FOREWORD

We are pleased to offer here the fifth and final volume of the Petra Papyri. It has taken twenty-four years to publish the carbonized documents found in the excavations of ACOR in the Petra Church. These two decades of arduous labor, in Amman, Helsinki, Ann Arbor, and elsewhere, have seen the deaths or illnesses of several members of the initial team. Some younger papyrologists have spent half of their lifetime with these small bits of coal which may appear rather unattractive for an outsider. From the very beginning, the work was divided between the Universities of Helsinki and Michigan. This final volume, however, was completed by the Finnish editorial team. It was made possible by the continuing support of the Academy of Finland and several Finnish foundations.

The present volume contains about forty documents of varying lengths and states of preservation, bringing the total number of edited texts to around ninety. This figure is given with the caveat that the number of individual documents a fragmentary stack comprised is not always clear. The published texts herein represent about two-thirds of all the rolls originally stored and burned in the church: the rest were beyond recovery or too fragmentary to merit publication. One of the better-preserved texts is an exchange of agricultural plots (50), which probably derives from the year 528/29 and may thus be the earliest Petra roll with a relatively secure date. Next, 51 is an emphyteutic lease, which, for its part, is a document type rarely attested in Egypt. Neither of these bears a direct link with the archdeacon Theodoros, son of Obodianos, the main figure of the archive, so it is not obvious how they ended up in the dossier. However, the lease seems to have been a discarded document used to write another text on the reverse side. This latter text (52) was a draft for a will in favor of an ecclesiastical institution. Several other papyri in this volume are also concerned with pious donations (53–56). Such documents were evidently not part of Theodoros' private papers but rather linked to his ecclesiastical role. The most intriguing of these ecclesiastical texts is a gift after death (55), dictated by a diseased man and preserved in six almost identical columns in the same roll. The preamble surprisingly includes a few lines in Latin as well.

Not surprisingly, a considerable part of the documents in this volume are again related to taxation, belonging to the same types published in previous volumes. The agreements concern slaves (57–58), land (59, 61, 75–76), ecclesiastical property (64), or workmen (82). Among the many shorter and poorly preserved rolls there are several accounts or lists of varying, often indeterminate nature, including a list of garments (74). One of the three very fragmentary official letters may have been sent by the provincial governor (60, 78–79). In addition to the minor documents edited in the volume, we offer an extensive list of names and important words appearing in the more fragmentary rolls.

The Arabic language is attested mainly in the toponyms, of which a large number survives in a long, albeit fragmentary, list of agricultural plots (62). Such material enables us to present in this volume a fuller introductory treatment of the Arabic dialect spoken in the region. This introduction is accompanied by a corresponding survey of the Greek language. Another introductory chapter examines the different individuals who appear in the Petra Papyri: men and women, free and enslaved, ecclesiastical, military, and lay, their number, background, and possible mutual links.

The contributors of this volume, named on the title page, have again received most valuable advice from Zbigniew T. Fiema, the chief excavator of the Petra Church project back in 1993 and of the Finnish Jabal Harun

excavations in 1997–2013. Bernhard Palme has discussed with us all the texts, sharing his expertise in late Roman administration. Kenneth W. Lai has read through the manuscript and corrected its stylistic infelicities. We cannot repeat here the names of all the colleagues who have, over the years, helped in producing the five Petra volumes. For this, we can only refer to the Forewords of the previous volumes. Nevertheless, we would especially like to highlight the support we have always received from Barbara A. Porter, director of the American Center of Oriental Research, and her staff. With gratitude, we bring this laborious assignment to its conclusion.

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